

The Millennial Question: An Attempt at a Solution

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Introduction

- In a previous talk, we sketched the various views on the millennium:
 - Pre-Millennial
 - Post-Millennial
 - A-Millennial
- Here we want to suggest why we think the pre-millennial view is to be preferred.

The Main Millennial Passage

Rev 20:1 (NIV) And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. 4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.

Main Millennial Passage, Cont.

Rev 20:6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. 7 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. 9 They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Its Context

- This passage is immediately preceded by Revelation 19:11-21, which looks to most readers as though it is a description of Jesus' second coming.
- Let's have a look at this passage too.

Revelation 19

11 (NIV) I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Revelation 19

17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great." 19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. 20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 21 The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Pre-Millennial Argument

- It seems to me that there are two lines of argument that arise from Revelation 20 and its preceding context Revelation 19 that point to a pre-millennial solution:
 - A continuity argument
 - An argument from OT allusions
- Let's look at each of these in turn.



Continuity Argument

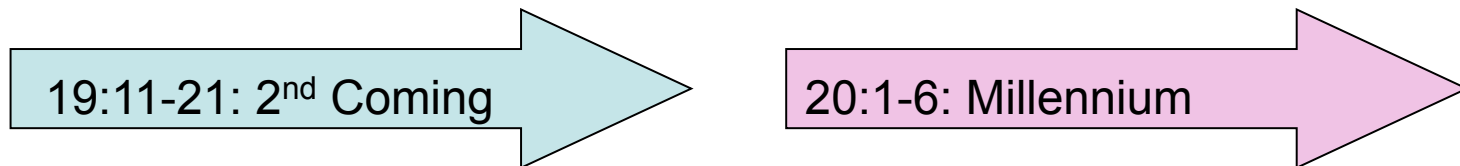
Continuity Argument

There are basically three views on the relationship of Revelation 19 to 20:

- Pre-Mill view
- Preterist view
- Recap view

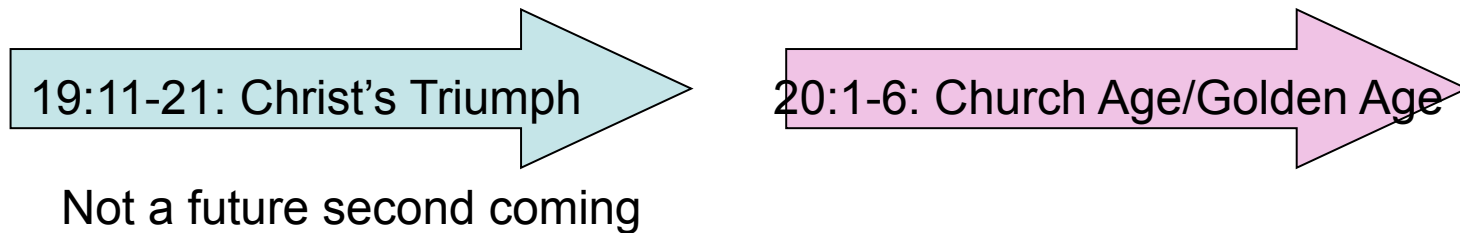
Pre-Mill View

- Revelation 20 continues in chronological succession after chapter 19, which narrates Jesus' 2nd coming (e.g., Beasley-Murray, Ladd, Walvoord):



Preterist View

- Chapter 20 continues in chronological succession after chapter 19, but 19 is not the second coming (e.g., Barnes, Caird):




Response to Preterist View

- If Revelation 19 is not the 2nd coming, then Revelation, the eschatology book *par excellence*, does not have a 2nd coming!
- This passage looks as much like the 2nd coming as any in Scripture; why do you believe in a second coming?
- Answer: some preterists don't believe in a future 2nd coming.

Recapitulation View

- Chapter 19 carries us to the second coming; chapter 20 goes back to the beginning of the church age, when Satan was bound.



19:11-21: 2nd Coming



20:1-6: Church Age – Satan Bound

Response to Recap View

Several features in Revelation 19 show continuity into Revelation 20:

- Satan, the Beast & False Prophet Punished:
 - All 3 gather armies for battle (16:13-16)
 - Armies gather to war against Christ (19:19)
 - B & FP thrown in lake of fire (19:20)
 - Christ slays armies (19:21)
 - Satan put in Abyss (20:1-3)
 - Is this continuity merely accidental?

Features Show Continuity

- Persecution by Beast & False Prophet
 - B & FP disposed of, with specific reference to mark of Beast & worship of image (19:20).
 - Martyrs brought to life who had not received mark or worshiped image (20:4).
 - How can saints rule during reign of B & FP if still being martyred, especially if B & FP are eschatological?

Features Show Continuity

- Coming of Christ
 - He comes to judge & make war (19:11)
 - Comes to smite nations, shepherd them with rod of iron (19:15)
 - Overcomers are promised a part in this:
 - Authority, rule, rod of iron (2:26-27)
 - Share throne with Christ (3:21)
 - Christ & armies smite/fight nations (19:19-21)
 - Thrones for judgment set; saints rule with Christ for 1000 years (20:4)

Summary

- These features suggest that chapter 20 is intended to follow 19 chronologically:
 - Satan, Beast, False Prophet punished.
 - Martyrs brought to life after persecution.
 - Christ comes & reigns with his saints.
- A similar picture is seen when we look at the OT allusions in Revelation 19.

Allusion Argument



Allusions in Revelation 19:11-21

- Judges/wars
 - Psalm 9:8; 96:13; Isa 11:4; Zech 14:3
- Robe in blood
 - Isa 63:1-3
- Armies of heaven
 - Deut 33:2-3; Zech 14:5
- Sword of mouth
 - Isa 49:2

Allusions in Revelation 19:11-21

- Smite nations
 - Isa 11:4
- Rule with iron rod
 - Psalm 2:9
- Tread winepress
 - Isa 63:3; Joel 3:13
- Call to birds
 - Ezek 39:4, 17-20

Allusions in Revelation 19:11-21

- Beast, kings, armies
 - Psalm 2:2, 12; Ezk 38:16; Zech 12:3, 14:2
- Thrown in fire
 - Isa 30:33; Dan 7:11

Golden Age vs Silver Age

- One of the most significant differences between the Pre-Mill view and the Post-Mill and A-Mill views is the relation of the coming of Jesus to the 'golden' and 'silver' ages:
 - Golden age: no more free sinners, no more death.
 - Silver age: sinners still free & sinning; still have death, but conditions quite good.

Golden Age vs Silver Age

- In the A-Mill scheme, now is the silver age, when Satan is bound and the Gospel can spread. Jesus hasn't returned yet. When he does, the golden age begins.
- In the Post-Mill scheme, the church will succeed in spreading the gospel, bringing in a silver age before Jesus returns. Then, the golden age.
- In the Pre-Mill scheme, Jesus will return. But before the golden age of the eternal state, there will be a silver age in which government is good, but sinners are still living free on earth.

Allusion Argument

- Several of the OT passages alluded to in Revelation 19:11-21 show silver age features following Jesus' return:
 - Zechariah 14
 - Daniel 7
 - Isaiah 30-32
 - Joel 3

Zechariah 14

- The Lord comes with his holy ones to wage war against the nations gathered against Jerusalem (1-5).
- The Lord destroys them miraculously (12-15).
- A silver age follows (16ff).
 - There are survivors.
 - They must come up to Jerusalem yearly.
 - Drought is threatened on disobedient.

Daniel 7

- The beast described in Rev 13 is a combination of the four in Daniel 7; Rev 19 records his destruction.
- The 4th beast thrown in fire (11); cp Rev 19:20.
- Thrones set for judgment (9-10); cp Rev 20:4.
- Universal dominion given Son of Man (13-14) and saints (22); cp Rev 20:4
- Subsequent silver age?
 - Reign of saints follows 4th beast's destruction (26).
 - Other beasts live on without power after 4th beast's destruction (11-12).

Isaiah 30-32

- God defeats the nations with the breath of his mouth (30:27-28), with a sword not of man (31:8), coming down on Mt Zion (31:4).
- He casts leader (king of Assyrians?) into the fire (30:33).
- Subsequent silver age?
 - Young Assyrians become forced labor (31:8).
 - God's king & rulers will rule righteously (32:1ff).

Joel 3

- God will gather all nations & judge them in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (1-2).
- His activity is pictured as threshing, trampling grapes, God roaring from Zion (13-14, 16).
- Jerusalem will be safe & holy (16-17).
- Subsequent silver age?
 - Nations sold as slaves (6-8).
 - Egypt, Edom desolate (19).

Summary

- Zechariah 14 pictures the nations after Christ's return being threatened with drought if they disobey.
- Daniel 7 pictures the 1st 3 beasts surviving but powerless after the Son of Man comes.
- Isaiah 30-32 pictures Assyrians as forced labor.
- Joel 3 pictures enslaved nations and some of them desolate.

